


GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-278](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In the event of a national emergency, the Department of Defense (DOD) can use commercial aircraft drawn from the Civil Reserve Air Fleet to augment its own airlift capabilities. The Civil Reserve Air Fleet is a fleet of aircraft owned by U.S. commercial air carriers but committed voluntarily to DOD for use during emergencies.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many air carriers experienced financial difficulties. This sparked concern about the fleet's ability to respond, if activated, and prompted the Subcommittee to ask GAO to determine whether the fleet could respond to an activation with the required number of aircraft and crews and in the required time frame. The Subcommittee also wanted to know whether the incentives used to attract and retain participants are effective.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the next evaluation of mobility requirements include a more thorough study of Civil Reserve Air Fleet capabilities and that the Air Mobility Command study whether smaller wide-body aircraft could be used as efficiently and effectively as the larger B-747-type aircraft to handle DOD's peacetime cargo business. DOD concurred with these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-278.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

Civil Reserve Air Fleet Can Respond as Planned, but Incentives May Need Revamping

What GAO Found

Civil Reserve Air Fleet participants can respond to an emergency or a war with the required number of aircraft and crews and within the required time frame. Currently, there are more aircraft committed to the fleet than are needed to fill the wartime requirements identified in the DOD Mobility Requirements Study 2005, which determined the requirements to fight and win two major theater wars. However, Civil Reserve Air Fleet requirements may increase the next time mobility requirements are studied. The last mobility requirements study was limited in that it did not consider the use of excess Civil Reserve Air Fleet capacity and the ability of some commercial aircraft to carry larger cargo than standard-sized pallets.

The incentives currently in place to encourage participation in the program, especially the incentive to participate in DOD's peacetime business, might be losing effectiveness and could become disincentives in the future. Some participants are not able to bid on peacetime cargo business because their fleets do not include B-747s, the predominant aircraft DOD uses for peacetime cargo missions. GAO found that B-747s carried out 94 percent of 946 missions flown by commercial aircraft in the first 10 months of fiscal year 2002. Furthermore, over 40 percent of recent missions did not use all available space or weight limits aboard B-747s. These missions might have been carried out less expensively with smaller wide-body aircraft. Using smaller aircraft would provide more peacetime business to a greater share of program participants, thus enhancing current incentives. However, the Air Force does not have sufficient management information to identify options for selecting the best available aircraft type for the mission.

Loading a B-747 at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware



Source: U.S. Air Force.